Chapter 7
Web 2.0 and Conscientização: Digital Students and Critical Reflection on and in Multimedia

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ABSTRACT
This chapter introduces multiliteracy as an extension of traditional notions of critical pedagogy that uphold student reflection in and about their world through dialogue as a crucial component of becoming a truly literate human. Students immersed in digital media should be encouraged to investigate and create multimedia in the 21st century classroom. However, instructors not familiar with digital media can find opening their classrooms to digital texts a risk to their professional identities. Just as true education should help students challenge, resist, and modify their perceptions of reality, educators must constantly disrupt their own classrooms to experience true conscientização, or consciousness of consciousness along with students.

INTRODUCTION
New media and digital technology are invigorating twenty-first century classrooms. Students, particularly those labelled “Generation Y” come to our classroom “wired” in a Web 2.0 world where they function on Facebook, Twitter, del.icio.us, and YouTube simultaneously. However, educators, particularly those trained at universities that value primarily traditional print media, may not be inclined to use or value the use of new media or digital technology in the classroom. Writing instructors in particular may see introducing students to the conventions of the academy using the print media as their primary concern. When wired students meet these “weird” educators, the
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collision of the two worlds can cause tension and hostility. The educators bemoan students who would rather tweet and text than read and write; the students tune out, turn off, or “text-out” of classes they find dull and uninviting.

This chapter poses multiliteracy in the critical classroom as a means of encouraging students to explore reality by inviting them to become critically multiliterate. First, the chapter provides background on the ways that multimedia and critical pedagogy intersect in the classroom. Second, I argue that engaging in multiliteracy mirrors Paulo Freire’s original work with Brazilian peasants. Just as Freire’s work began with the analysis of cultural themes portrayed in photographs and visual representations of students’ immediate surroundings, so, too, can twenty-first century students and instructors be challenged to investigate generative themes in their communities and cultures through the new media and digital technologies they often take for granted in their everyday lives. Finally, the chapter provides one example of how using multimedia can challenge students and educators to explore their often fragile identities in the classroom to become students/teachers along with teachers/students.

BACKGROUND

Twenty-first century educators can promote multiliteracy using the tenants of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy began with the methods and practices first espoused by Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed, particularly the concept of education as conscientização, or “consciousness of consciousness.” Although practitioners over the last thirty years have interpreted Freire’s original pedagogy in a plethora of ways, the majority of those interpretations focus on counteracting the deficiencies of the “banking system” of education, a system that sees students as blank slates or empty repositories to be passively filled with knowledge (see Giroux, 2001; Lee, 2000; Shor, 1980; Thelin & Tassoni, 2000).

Multiliteracy is one means of counteracting the banking system. When students are actively engaged with new media in a networked environment, they engage in dialogue, the centrepiece of Freire’s pedagogy. Freire (1998) admonishes those who minimized dialogue as a part as educational practice:

How can I dialogue if I consider myself a member of the in-group of “pure” men, the owners of truth and knowledge, for whom all non-members are “these people” or “the great unwashed”? How can I dialogue if I start from the premise that naming the world is the task of an elite and that the presence of people in history is a sign of deterioration, thus to be avoided? (p. 71)

Exploring the digital world through multimedia can bring all together in naming reality through socially-constructed means, such as folksonomy. Thus, multiliteracy allows educators and students to move beyond simply using digital media as a means of transmitting “truth and knowledge” toward effectively navigating, managing, and transmitting through digital media use (see Hawisher & Selfe, 1999; Kress, 2003; Selber, 2004; Wysocki, Johnson-Eilola, Selfe, & Sirc, 2004).

Several composition theorists have investigated the intersections of critical pedagogy and multiliteracy. Barbara Blake Duffelmeyer (2002) questioned how critical pedagogy and classroom technologies can work together to “provide an occasion for students to reflect on and articulate their relationship to digital technology, the forces that influenced the formation of that relationship, and the ways that they might develop some agency within the parameters of that relationship” (p. 358). Stuart Selber (2004) calls for students to be trained functionally, rhetorically, and critically in the use and consumption of technology. Functional multiliteracy is defined as “the skills associated
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